

Judge denies citizen panel formal role in SPD reforms

The ruling by U.S. District Judge James Robart limited the reach of the Community Police Commission, which has sought to broadly interpret its mandate.

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A federal judge Tuesday denied a [citizen commission's request](#) to formally intervene in court-ordered Seattle police reforms and refused to grant delays the panel requested to offer its views on policy changes.

But in a 19-page order, U.S. District Judge James Robart permitted the Community Police Commission (CPC) to file memorandums with the court “commenting on any issue or motion” raised as part of the city’s [settlement agreement](#) with the Department of Justice to curb excessive force and biased policing in the police department.

Robart also granted “compromise” delays offered by federal attorneys to allow the CPC, which was created as part of last year’s settlement, more time to comment on bias-free policing, brief detentions of citizens and the Police Department’s community outreach.

However, Robart denied the CPC’s request to extend deadlines to comment on use-of-force training curricula, an early-intervention system to identify problem officers and a policy manual for the Police Department’s internal-investigation unit, the Office of Professional Accountability.

Robart’s ruling represented a victory for federal attorneys, who objected to the CPC’s request to intervene, arguing it would cause undue delay in the reform. They also fully objected to some of the delays sought by the CPC.

In his ruling, Robart wrote that “permitting intervention would likely result in undue delay without a corresponding benefit to existing litigants, the court, or the process of reform because the existing parties are zealously pursuing the same ultimate objectives as the CPC.”

His decision limited the reach of the city-created CPC, which has sought to broadly interpret its mandate to ensure community engagement and police accountability.

Robart wrote that the CPC’s attempt to expand its role beyond that described in the settlement agreement “threatens to slow the process of reform and full implementation” of the agreement.

The 15-member CPC already has been granted a “defined and robust” role in the reform process, Robart wrote, noting that its ultimate objective — “constitutional and effective policing” — is shared by the Department of Justice.

In allowing the CPC to file memorandums, Robart granted the commission “amicus curiae” status as a friend of the court, an alternative suggested by the CPC in its request to intervene.

The CPC, as part of its motion to intervene, requested delays ranging from 31 to 120 days, which Robart reduced or denied.

In a statement, Lisa Daugaard, co-chair of the CPC, said, “We appreciate that Judge Robart created a formal avenue for the Commission to communicate with the Court as amicus or ‘friend of the court.’ ”

The CPC will comply with the deadlines set by the court, the statement said, but continues to believe it will be “very challenging for us to perform our expected role effectively” in some of the time periods.

“We sought short extensions in order to reach a consensus approach in key areas with SPD and the other City agencies involved in this process, because proceeding in that way avoids division and strengthens the partnership between the community and the police department. That requires a bit more time but in our view is enormously worthwhile in the long run. We will continue to look for opportunities to build toward that consensus.”

The Department of Justice declined to comment on the ruling.

Seattle Times staff reporter Mike Carter contributed to this story.

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